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SUBJECT: ERA OF CLOSER COOPERATION BEGINS WITH BASRAH UNIVERSITY

REF: BASRAH 061

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Introduction/Summary
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¶1. (SBU/NF) In a December 3 meeting, Basrah University's new chancellor, Dr. Saleh Najim, reviewed the status of the province's premier academic institution and related plans to create a new university devoted solely to petroleum and mineral studies. The PRT outlined possible avenues of cooperation, which received an enthusiastic response from Chancellor Najim, who hopes such cooperation will diminish Iranian influence at the university. The chancellor signed documents that formally launch new U.S. programs to support agricultural and legal studies at the university. The pro-American chancellor's approval of these programs, and his enthusiastic endorsement of other proposed cooperation, sets the stage for a sustained and mutually beneficial relationship with this important Basrah institution. End Introduction/Summary.

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¶2. (U) Basrah University is the premier high-education institution of Basrah province. Chancellor Najim informed us that the university has some 30,000 students studying in its 15 colleges, and another 1,000 students doing post-graduate work. Its two campuses in Basrah city house professional schools for law, medicine, dentistry, and nursing. According to the chancellor, 20 Basrah University students have received scholarships from the Ministry of Education to study in the U.S. this year. The Ministry of Education has asked Chancellor Najim to help establish a second university in Basrah, one that will be devoted solely to petroleum and mineral studies. The new university, modeled after King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, will be located near the new Sports City complex being built on undeveloped land within Basrah city limits. Najim said the new university is expected to take two years to complete once started.

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New Prospects for U.S. Cooperation
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¶3. (U) During the meeting, PRT section heads discussed possible avenues of U.S. cooperation with Basrah University. These include seeking greater involvement in USG educational and cultural exchange programs, support for the establishment of a TOEFEL center at the university, training for the university's English instructors, increased cooperation in legal training for law students, and opportunities for collaboration with universities in the United States. (Note: Basrah University

currently has a relationship with the Colorado School of Mines that is not meeting its expectations. Without going into details, but suggesting that the relationship may be on paper only and no longer viable, the Chancellor said Basrah University might be partly to blame.) The PRT also discussed two proposals to support the engineering department and dental school that are expected to be funded under CERP and QRF.

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An Opportunity to Diminish Iranian Influence

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¶4. (SBU/NF) Chancellor Najim was enthusiastic about these opportunities and expressed support for them. Having spent time in Texas, the chancellor said he respected the U.S. and wanted to increase cooperation with the USG and American academic institutions. He hoped increased U.S. cooperation with the university would diminish Iranian influence (reftel), which had grown under the previous chancellor to include training of students and faculty in Iran. Chancellor Najim wanted to reverse course, and said that he had rejected an offer by the Iranian Consul General to finance a journal that would be published by Basrah University's Iranian studies department.

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Launching Programs to Support Agricultural and Legal Studies

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¶5. (U) PRT used the meeting to formalize two new programs at the university. The Chancellor signed letters of sustainment for three CERP-funded agricultural testing labs (water, soil, and palm date tissue) worth almost one million dollars. Establishment of these laboratories was one of the recommendations made by the Borlaug Group after conducting an extensive assessment of Basrah's agricultural sector. Chancellor Najim also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the terms of the Access to Justice program, designed and

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implemented by the PRT's Rule of Law section. Under the program, the university's law students will partner with lawyers from Basrah's Bar Association to provide legal representation to detainees in Iraq's criminal justice system.

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Comment

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¶6. (SBU/NF) PRT cooperation with Basrah University will increase substantially over the near- and long-term now that Dr. Saleh Najim has taken over as its chancellor. UK-educated and westernized, Dr. Najim understands the advantages of cooperation with the U.S. and welcomes it. Having developed a good working relationship with the new chancellor when he was Dean of the Engineering School, the PRT is well positioned to build a strong and fruitful relationship with Basrah University. This is a welcome change from the recent past when the former chancellor, either because of inertia or suspected pro-Iranian sentiments, made our dealings with the university difficult, most recently by blocking the Access to Justice project proposed by the PRT's Rule of Law section. Chancellor Najim's approval of this and other programs, and his enthusiastic endorsement of other proposed cooperation with the U.S., set the stage for a sustained and mutually beneficial relationship with this important Basrah institution.

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